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ABSTRACT

Approaches and materials which are used to develop the vocabulary of high risk students at the University of Southern Colorado, an open enrollment university, are described in this paper. A basic skills reading course is required of students scoring below the 22nd percentile on the Cooperative English Test and a developmental reading course is required of all students scoring below the 81st percentile. The sections of the basic skills course emphasize vocabulary development and dictionary usage, words in context, word parts, language, varying interpretations of known words, and college level words. Cognate words with Spanish are noted, and attention is given to developing understanding of figures of speech. Materials used for instruction include "Reading Power," by James Brown; "Mini Course in Vocabulary," tape 1, by Royce Adams; and "Programed Vocabulary 3600," by Feinstein. (MKM)

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READING SKILLS FOR COLLEGE FRESHMEN:
A BASIC SKILLS PROGRAM AT THE
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN COLORADO

TO BE PRESENTED:

THURSDAY - MAY 13, 1976

2:00 — 3:00 p.m.

BALBOA ROOM DISNEYLAND HOTEL

CS 002 537

Sometime around 1600 Frances Bacon observed "Reading maketh a full man; conference a ready man; and writing an exact man." The Basic Communications Program at the University of Southern Colorado centers around Bacon's three subjects: reading, speech, and writing.

Instruction in Basic Skills consists of three separate courses of three class hours per week for each subject. Beyond the Basic Skills courses students take one course in Developmental Reading and two courses in college writing. In addition, the Basic Communications Program maintains a well-equipped lab where students may work on individual problems. Students are assigned to these courses on the basis of scores received on the Cooperative English Tests of Reading Comprehension and English Expression with the 22nd percentile serving as the cut-off point. In the fall of 1975, of 1152 students taking the tests, 45 per cent in reading and 55 per cent in writing fell below the 22nd percentile. Students scoring low in both reading and writing take a special section of the required speech course.

The University of Southern Colorado, located in Pueblo, Colorado, maintains an open-door policy on enrollment. Some students are working in two year degree programs, some are working toward a bachelor's or master's degree and some are trying to update previously learned skills to enhance career opportunities. Consequently there is a wide age-range in the student body. Many minority groups are present with Spanish surnamed constituting 23 percent of the student body.

Reading, speech and writing instructors have identified severe language deficiency as an underlying problem for most of the high risk students. For some of these students the deficiency may not be so much due to a lack of knowledge as it is due to a lack of practice in using the language they have. Therefore, all three areas make a concerted though differentiated effort in language development.

The main body of this paper will be a demonstration of the language portion of the reading course. It will include diagnostic procedures, methods, materials, and evaluation.

BASIC SKILLS AND DEVELOPMENTAL READING

Before turning to that section of the paper an overall view of the two reading courses will put the language portion into its perspective with the other segments of reading instruction.

Eighteen modules have been developed by the reading staff. The first eight are included in the Basic Skills course required of students falling below the 22nd percentile on the Cooperative English Test (CET). The remaining ten modules are in the Developmental Reading course required of all students excepting those who test out at the 81st percentile. Six of the eighteen modules deal with some aspect of language or vocabulary. Two modules concern receptive comprehension and two reflective comprehension. The last three modules are designed to develop rate-flexibility. The other five modules treat college orientation, study habits,

reading rationale, a reading preview technique and test taking skills.

College Orientation, Reading Rationale and Study Habits Modules

The University catalogue is the text for the college orientation module. This module has proved to be invaluable to the new students in acquainting them with professional rank, academic degrees, university divisions and departments within the divisions, services available to students, and graduation requirements. In addition it serves as practice material in the skill of scanning.

The reading rationale module serves to convince the students that reading is first of all a worthwhile skill to have and secondly that it is one that can be improved with instruction and practice. Students disabled enough in their reading skills to score below the 22nd percentile on a standardized test have long since given up on themselves as readers.

Study habits, reading technique and the test taking skills modules are designed to help students with the essentials of budgeting time, taking notes, previewing material and developing test wiseness.

This leaves the vocabulary and comprehension modules which are interspersed with each other on a level of difficulty basis and the three rate development modules which are taught last in the entire sequence and utilize the skills in the first 15 modules.

Diagnostic Testing of Vocabulary and Comprehension

A staff-devised diagnostic test is given to students early in the Basic Skills course. This test covers dictionary usage, words in context and word parts in the vocabulary section and both receptive and reflective questions in the comprehension section. Students who indicate a proficiency in any area are exempted from its corresponding module.

Each module in this Basic Skills section offers a differentiated approach to mastering the material therein. There are group activities for the classroom, tapes and programed material in the lab and a text the student can use on his own time.

Vocabulary A: Dictionary Usage

The dictionary usage module consists of three parts: using guide words to locate words, correct choice of meaning, and diacritical marks. Reading Power by James I. Brown is the text for this and the other two modules in basic vocabulary skills. In addition most students will use Royce Adams' Mini Course in Vocabulary, tape 1, in the lab and a staff-designed worksheet. While the students are gaining knowledge in how to use the dictionary in their reading course they are putting the knowledge to use in their writing and speech courses. In writing the students are learning correct spelling, synonyms for the overworked words, accurate meanings for misused words and proper usage. In speech the students are trying to learn message structuring and the techniques to improve it. One of the techniques is an expanding vocabulary.

Vocabulary B: Words in Context

Students needing help in using context to give meaning to unknown words will read the chapter in Reading Power on this subject and work through an instructional pamphlet.

Vocabulary C: Word Parts

A very simplified approach to common prefixes and roots is included in Brown's Reading Power. The students get a more thorough experience with word parts in a later module in the Developmental Reading Course.

Mastery of these three vocabulary modules and two in low level comprehension qualify a student to move into the Developmental Reading course. Here he will meet three more language/vocabulary modules and two high level comprehension modules before beginning work on the three rate development modules which conclude the course.

Vocabulary D: Language

The first of the three vocabulary modules in Developmental Reading is labeled simply "Language." Through classroom lecture and assigned articles to be read this module explores the development of the English language and its use in the communication of ideas. Students gain an awareness of the contributions made to English by many language and cultural groups throughout the world. They learn that English itself consists of many sub-groups which show great variation from one another. While the students are listening to lectures and reading articles about language they are also practicing note taking skills taught in another module. At the conclusion

of this language module the students take an essay test which enables them to demonstrate their mastery of that portion of the test taking module.

Vocabulary E: Varying Interpretations of Known Words

The second vocabulary module in this latter group of modules is by far the hardest to teach and to evaluate. It concerns word meanings not readily discerned in sentences even though the words in isolation are well known. If reading is a process of recreating in a reader's mind the thought that was in the author's mind it is often in this neglected area that the breakdown occurs. The area is neglected because vocabulary instruction tends to concentrate on the words unknown to the student and rarely deals with the known words. Commercial materials are hard to find except in fragments here and there. Consequently the reading staff has had to devise and revise its own material.

To introduce the module the class members might be asked if they know the meaning of the word <u>furniture</u>. Of course, everyone does. Then the students are given a piece of paper with 12 household items listed (such as tabl., bed, TV, radio, drapes, etc.) and told to circle the items that are included in the meaning of <u>furniture</u>. The results are then tallied on the board. Students are usually amazed to find that there is complete agreement on only four or five items on the list. They are then ready to investigate sentences where commonly known words yield different interpretations.

Generally the instruction deals with: figures of speech and literary allusions, denotation versus connotation, abstraction and concreteness, and levels of usage. It is in this area that the restricted background of many students makes itself apparent. For example one paragraph in a comprehension module refers to a man "who fails to find New York's 'Open Sesame!'" In three classes one instructor was unable to find a single student who knew the source of the quotation.

Figures of speech outside of the local, current high school jargon are almost unrecognized. Because it is impossible in a ten week course to build a lifetime of experience in this area the instructional material serves mainly to develop an awareness of the problem rather than to solve it. Students might be given a list of figures of speech all dealing with the same topic (e.g. food or dog) and told where to look to find the meaning or given the opportunity to derive possible meanings in class discussion.

Explaining the difference between the denotative and connotative meanings of a word becomes more involved. One activity is class discussion of emotionally laden words, taboo words, advertising words and so on. Another activity is playing Bertrand Russell's game of Conjugating Irregular Verbs (I am firm. You are obstinate. He is a pig-headed fool.). Still another activity is analyzing an old poem, "Semantics," that begins, "Call a woman a kitten but never a cat...."

An awareness of the misinterpretation possible for abstract words results from having students supply a concrete value in such sentences as, "Mr. Jones is wealthy. His income is at least $_____ per year," or "Mrs. Perez, an elderly pedestrian, was struck by a car. Mrs. Perez is ____ years old." When the answers given by all students are summarized a wide discrepancy is seen. Another worksheet has students arrange a set of words in order from concrete to abstract (e.g., dime, coin, cash, wealth).

Pointing out to students that a word means one thing in one situation and something else in another is the task for the levels of usage segment of this module. In the reading course the students read an article on the subject. The application comes in the speech and writing courses.

Vocabulary F: College Level Words

The final vocabulary module is college level vocabulary using the first seven chapters of Feinstein's Programed Vocabulary 3600 as the text. The author-supplied tests were too simple to yield discriminating scores so the reading staff developed its own criterion referenced tests. Latin and Greek word parts comprise the first two chapters and offer a much more challenging approach to the subject than the students experienced in the Basic Skills course. The next three chapters are lists of words widely used in college texts. The sixth chapter on rhetoric ties in closely with the writing course the students take concurrently with Developmental Reading. The seventh chapter on Name Words is a pleasurable note

on which to conclude vocabulary study. Throughout the book instructors find it useful to point out cognate words with the Spanish words that may be in the students' vocabularies. For example: sanguine and Sangre de Cristo mountains, denigrate and Monte Nigro, carnivorous and chili con carne.

A partial evaluation of the Basic Communications Program can be made when students noticeably begin to integrate the many skills they have learned in the separate subjects of reading, speech and writing, but the real worth of the Program becomes apparent when the attrition figures drop and a larger percentage of the student body remains to earn a degree.